

## Research and Evaluation Activities in USDA

### From the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services' Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

The Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) has several new and ongoing projects of interest to the nutrition and family economics community. Most publications listed below are available from CNPP by writing to USDA-CNPP, 1120 20<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 200 North, Washington, DC 20036; by calling CNPP at 202-418-0243; or by reaching CNPP at [www.usda.gov/cnpp](http://www.usda.gov/cnpp).

#### *Expenditures on Children by Families, 1998*

Each year since 1960, USDA has published a report that provides estimates of annual expenditures on children from birth through age 17. USDA estimates are used to set State child support guidelines and payments for foster care. This latest report, which is based on data from the 1990-92 Consumer Expenditure Survey, presents the 1998 figures for husband-wife and single-parent families. The Consumer Price Index is used to update the estimates.

For husband-wife families, child-rearing expenses are provided for three income groups; for single-parent families, expenses are provided for two income groups. Estimates are also provided for husband-wife families in urban areas in the West, Northeast, South, and Midwest; rural areas throughout the United States; and the United States overall to adjust,

in part, for differences in prices and expenditure patterns. For single-parent families, estimates are provided for the overall United States only. Expenditures on children are provided for the major budgetary components: Housing, food, transportation, clothing, health care, child care and education, and miscellaneous goods and services.

For the overall United States, annual child-rearing expenses are between \$8,240 and \$9,340 for a child in a two-child, married-couple family in the middle-income group. Housing and food account for the largest percentage of total child-rearing expenses. Expenditures are lower for younger children and higher for older children.

#### *Healthy Eating Index*

To report on how well the American diet conforms to healthful eating patterns, CNPP publishes the Healthy Eating Index (HEI), which provides a measure of overall diet quality. The Index, based on different aspects of a healthful diet, examines 10 dietary components: The degree to which a person's diet conforms to recommended servings of USDA's Food Guide Pyramid for the food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, milk products, and meat/meat alternates), total fat consumption, saturated fat consumption, cholesterol intake, sodium intake, and variety in the diet.

CNPP used the 1994-96 Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) to calculate the latest HEI and to produce in-depth analysis of the HEI

for three groups: African Americans,<sup>1</sup> children,<sup>2</sup> and American Indians.<sup>3</sup> These analyses showed that among African Americans, most have a diet that needs improvement or have a diet that is poor; only 5 percent have a good diet. Also, the quality of the diet for African Americans is lower than the quality of the diet for other racial groups. African Americans, however, are not alone in needing to improve their diets. Most children also have a diet that needs improvement or is poor. As children get older, the quality of their diet declines, and children score particularly low for fruit and milk consumption. Among American Indians, less than 50 percent meet the dietary recommendations for 8 of the 10 components of the HEI.

#### *Thrifty Food Plan*

The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) serves as a national standard for a nutritious diet that is at practically the lowest possible cost. Used as the basis for food stamp allotments, the Plan specifies the types and quantities of foods that people in 12 age-gender groups could consume to have a nutritious diet at a minimal cost. The last revision of the TFP market basket was in 1983.

CNPP is revising the TFP market basket to account for the most current knowledge of nutritional needs. This revision of the TFP is the first one to incorporate

<sup>1</sup>Report Card on the Diet Quality of African Americans, *Nutrition Insights*, Number 6.

<sup>2</sup>Report Card on the Diet Quality of Children, *Nutrition Insights*, Number 9.

<sup>3</sup>The Diet Quality of American Indians: Evidence From the Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals, *Nutrition Insights*, Number 12.

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the serving recommendations of the *Food Guide Pyramid*. Data used are from the 1989-91 CSFII and various national price data bases. The cost of the revised TFP was set so that it did not exceed the average real cost of the TFP for 1989-91. This cost was used to ascertain whether, and how, a household could have a nutritious diet.

CNPP is also developing menus and recipes based on this new market basket. These menus and recipes represent low-cost and nutritious meals that food stamp recipients can follow to make the best use of their food dollars.

### ***Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children***

To help improve the diets of young children 2 to 6 years old, USDA has developed the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*. USDA developed this “new” Pyramid to simplify educational messages and to focus on young children’s food preferences and nutritional requirements. Released on March 25, 1999, the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is an adaptation of the original *Food Guide Pyramid* that was released in 1992.

Young children have unique food patterns and needs, compared with older children and adults. For example, more of their servings of the meat group come from ground beef and luncheon meats, and fewer servings come from fish. Young children are more likely than adults to eat ready-to-eat cereals. Also, compared with older children and adults, young children are less likely to eat lettuce salads and more likely to eat cooked green beans. Young children are also more likely to drink fruit juice than to eat whole fruit. Many young children are not eating healthful diets, and nutritionists know that early food experiences

are crucial to food preferences and patterns throughout life.

The graphic and messages in the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* have been made easier to understand and more appropriate for this young audience, their parents, and their caregivers. The graphic shows foods that are eaten commonly by young children, drawn in a realistic style, and shown in single-serving sizes when possible. In several cases, the new graphic depicts foods that children need to eat more often. The names of the food groups have been shortened to simplify them, and the number of recommended servings is a single number rather than a range.

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* has a key message: eating a variety of foods is healthful. The Pyramid is surrounded by illustrations of children engaged in active pursuits to show the importance of physical activity.

The *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* is based on actual food consumption patterns of young children. CNPP analyzed the diets of young children and adapted existing food-guidance recommendations to meet children’s specific needs. The development of the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children*, as well as supporting educational material, was a direct result of this research.

CNPP staff examined young children’s food choices and typical portion sizes that were reported for them in national food consumption surveys. The staff then determined that the nutrients in these foods, if eaten in amounts recommended by the original *Food Guide Pyramid*, would meet children’s nutritional needs. The Pyramid was used as the basis for a new graphic because

Pyramid food groups and numbers of servings resulted in a nutritionally adequate diet for young children.

The booklet “Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children 2 to 6 Years Old” is based on the needs for food and nutrition information identified by parents and caregivers of young children. Educational messages and prototype materials for the *Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children* were tested with parents and caregivers in two rounds of focus groups that were held in several geographic regions of the United States. The information that was gathered from participants in the focus groups helped USDA to determine the messages to include in the materials and the types of materials to develop.

The booklet contains information and advice for parents and caregivers, including the following:

- Tips for encouraging healthful eating
- Basic information about the *Food Guide Pyramid*
- Information on “child-size” servings
- List of foods in each group to encourage young children to eat a variety of different foods
- Suggested activities that parents can use to involve their young children in meal preparation
- Ideas about snacks
- Ideas about meal planning
- Chart to track foods eaten over several days
- “Hands-on” food activity for home or child care centers

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### ***Dietary Guidelines for Americans***

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, first released in 1980 and revised in 1985, 1990, and 1995, are published jointly by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (DHHS). The Dietary Guidelines provide the basis for Federal nutrition policy and nutrition education activities. Nutrition and health professionals promote these Guidelines to focus Americans' attention on what constitutes a healthful diet. The Dietary Guidelines bulletin advises healthy Americans, ages 2 years and over, about food choices that promote health and prevent disease. The bulletin is based on the recommendations of a Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC)—a panel of nationally recognized nutrition and health experts.

In 1998, USDA and DHHS appointed a DGAC to review the 1995 Guidelines and to recommend changes that reflect new scientific evidence on diet and health relationships and new information on the usefulness of the earlier editions to professionals and the public. The committee held its first public meeting in September 1998, its second, March 1999.

The committee expects to hold two additional public meetings in 1999 and continues to receive written comments from the public about the Guidelines. Transcripts of the committee's meetings are available at the following Web site: [www.ars.usda.gov/dgac](http://www.ars.usda.gov/dgac). By the end of 1999, the committee will issue its recommendations in a report to the Secretaries of USDA and DHHS. The two Departments will then review the DGAC report and in the year 2000, release jointly the fifth edition of the Dietary Guidelines.

### ***Dietary Guidance Working Group***

The Dietary Guidance Working Group was established on January 2, 1986, under the Subcommittee for Human Nutrition of the Research and Education Committee, Secretary's Policy and Coordination Council. The Working Group was formed to help agencies meet the objectives of legislation related to dietary guidance and USDA's food and nutrition policy. Eight USDA agencies are represented; DHHS has a liaison member. Title III of the National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act of 1990 calls for the Secretaries of USDA and DHHS to publish the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* at least every 5 years and for the Secretaries to review and approve dietary guidance for the general population before the Guidelines are released. The purpose of all of these actions is to ensure that Federal dietary guidance is consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* or is based on new medical or scientific knowledge determined to be valid by the Secretaries.

The Working Group reviewed nine draft publications produced by the two Departments in fiscal year 1998. The following are some of the special topics the Working Group discussed at monthly meetings:

- Standards of the new Body Mass Index for children and adolescents that were developed by the National Center for Health Statistics
- A presentation on the development of "yourSELF"—Team Nutrition materials for adolescents that included a viewing of accompanying videos
- A report on the project "Girl Power and You" that is being developed for 11- to 14-year-old urban African American girls.

### ***USDA's Food Guide: Updating the Research Base***

The *Food Guide Pyramid* graphic illustrates what constitutes a healthful diet and conveys the importance of balance, moderation, and consumption of a variety of foods. The research base for USDA's food-guidance system provides the scientific underpinning of USDA's food-guidance information for consumers. The research also provides documentation that recommended patterns of food selection continue to meet the Guide's established nutritional objectives. Food group composites, based on survey data on food consumption, are developed to update the research base. Food consumption data show the relative frequency of the selection of specific foods within a food group (e.g., vegetables) or subgroup (e.g., dark-green leafy). Nutrient profiles are then developed for each food group composite from the most current data on food composition available at the time. *Food Guide Pyramid* patterns at 1,600 calories, 2,200 calories, and 2,800 calories are then created by using the revised composites to determine whether recommendations of the *Food Guide Pyramid* continue to meet established nutritional objectives, such as the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA).

Data on food composition and food consumption are being used to update the research base for the Food Guide. The data are from the 1994-96 CSFII. Nutrient profiles will be developed based on the weighted consumption of foods within each food group and subgroup, 1996 nutrient data, and the higher levels of folates in grain products that became effective in January 1988. The most recent update of the research base used data on food consumption from the 1989-91 CSFII for children ages 2 through 6 to develop the new

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*Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children.*

Also, data from the 1989-91 CSFII for all individuals were used to update the research base for the original *Food Guide Pyramid*, first developed using USDA's 1977-78 Nationwide Food Consumption Survey.

***Symposium on Childhood Obesity:  
Causes and Prevention***

CNPP sponsored a full-day symposium on childhood obesity that featured some of the Nation's leading authorities in the area. Some presentations focused on the relationship of diet and physical inactivity to childhood obesity, the health risk to children because of obesity, the factors influencing children's food intake, and the prevention of obesity in school-age children and adolescents. Other presentations centered on reducing childhood obesity and the role of government programs (such as child nutrition), choosing a policy strategy regarding childhood obesity, increasing physical activity among children, and the Federal perspective on childhood obesity and governmental intervention. Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture; Shirley Watkins, Under Secretary of Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services; and David Satcher, Surgeon General, also spoke about causes and prevention of childhood obesity. Proceedings were published and are available to the public.